AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims so that they read as follows:

Claims 1-13 (Cancelled)

Claim 14 (Previously Presented): A method, according to claim 16, wherein:

said step of forming said laminate for magnetic data recording is at least one method selected from the group consisting of sputtering, ion plating, plasma CVD, and vacuum deposition.

Claim 15 (Previously Presented): A method, according to claim 14, wherein:

said step of forming said protective layer is a method selected from the group consisting of sputtering, ion plating, plasma CVD, and vacuum deposition.

Claim 16 (Previously Presented): A method for manufacturing a thin-film magnetic recording medium, comprising the steps of:

forming a laminate for magnetic data recording on a nonmagnetic substrate;

said step of forming being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

forming a protective layer on said laminate;

said step of forming a protective layer being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

plasma-etching a first surface of said protective layer;

said step of plasma-etching conducted immediately after forming the protective layer in a vacuum and in a process gas mixture comprising an inert gas, an oxygen gas, and a nitrogen gas and a gas selected from the group consisting of a chlorine gas and a fluorine gas;

conducting the steps of forming a laminate, forming a protective layer, and plasma-etching continuously; and

forming a lubricant layer on said first surface of said protective layer, whereby surface defects are minimized and surface quality is greatly improved.

Claim 17 (Cancelled)

Claim 18 (Original): A method according to claim 15 wherein:

said step of plasma-etching is conducted in a process gas mixture contain the process gas mixture of Ar, O_2, and N_2 where the mixing ratio thereof is substantially 6: 1: 3.

Claims 19-20 (Cancelled)

Claim 21 (Currently Amended): A method for manufacturing a thin-film magnetic recording medium, comprising the steps of:

forming a laminate for magnetic data recording on a nonmagnetic substrate;

said step of forming being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

forming a protective layer on said laminate;

said step of forming a protective layer being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

plasma-etching a first surface of said protective layer;

said step of plasma-etching conducted in a vacuum and in a process gas mixture comprising an inert gas, an oxygen gas, and a nitrogen gas and a gas selected from the group consisting of a chlorine gas and a fluorine gas, wherein particles on the surface of the protective layer are removed to make a smooth surface;

conducting the steps of forming a laminate, forming a protective layer, and plasma-etching continuously; and

forming a lubricant layer on said first surface of said protective layer, whereby surface defects are minimized and surface quality is greatly improved.

Claim 22 (Previously Presented): A method, according to claim 21, wherein:

said step of forming said laminate for magnetic data recording is at least one method selected from the group consisting of sputtering, ion plating, plasma CVD, and vacuum deposition.

Claim 23 (Previously Presented): A method, according to claim 22, wherein:

said step of forming said protective layer is a method selected from the group consisting of sputtering, ion plating, plasma CVD, and vacuum deposition.

Claim 24 (Previously Presented): A method according to claim 23 wherein:

said step of plasma-etching is conducted in a process gas mixture contain the process gas mixture of Ar, O_2, and N_2 where the mixing ratio thereof is substantially 6: 1: 3.

Claim 25 (New): A method for manufacturing a thin-film magnetic recording medium, comprising the steps of:

forming a laminate for magnetic data recording on a nonmagnetic substrate;

said step of forming being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

forming a protective layer on said laminate;

said step of forming a protective layer being a dry process in a vacuum atmosphere;

plasma-etching a first surface of said protective layer;

said step of plasma-etching conducted immediately after forming the protective layer in a vacuum and in a process gas mixture comprising an inert gas, an oxygen gas, and a nitrogen gas and a gas selected from the group consisting of a chlorine gas and a fluorine gas, wherein particles on the surface of the protective layer are removed to make a smooth surface;

conducting the steps of forming a laminate, forming a protective layer, and plasma-etching continuously; and

forming a lubricant layer on said first surface of said protective layer, whereby surface defects are minimized and surface quality is greatly improved.